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DEPT FOR EUR/WE LARREA; DRL/IRF ABRAMSON, KELLY

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SUBJECT: VATICAN ENCOURAGING MUSLIM SELF-CRITICISM ON TERROR

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) told the Ambassador January 10 that he constantly emphasized to his Muslim interlocutors the importance of condemning terrorism. He agreed with the Ambassador that as important as Pope Benedict's consistent condemnations of terrorism were, it was crucial for the Muslim world to hear the same message from within. PCID engages in numerous inter-religious dialogue projects, and supports useful dialogue efforts at the local level. In general, however, we feel that PCID could provide better support to the pope as he engages on these issues. The Ambassador strongly emphasized that in this "war of ideas" PCID had to use all the means at its disposal in order to help the world avoid a clash of civilizations. End Summary.

Muslims Must Hear Message From Within

¶2. (C) Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), told the Ambassador January 10 that he constantly emphasized to his Muslim interlocutors the importance of condemning terrorism. Fitzgerald, who also heads the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims (housed within PCID) agreed with the Ambassador that as important as Pope Benedict's consistent condemnations of terrorism were, it was crucial for the Muslim world to hear the same message from within. He said that his interlocutors frequently agreed with the need to speak out, but did not follow through as often.

Council Activities

¶3. (SBU) PCID takes part in dialogue with representatives of numerous faiths, and publishes books and pamphlets on various aspects of inter-religious dialogue. It also facilitates inter-religious dialogue that often unfolds in greater depth at the local level. Fitzgerald, an Englishman of Irish background, has also been involved in initiatives with the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. He outlined for the Ambassador the activities of PCID's Nostra Aetate foundation, which he said enjoyed great success in overcoming cultural and religious barriers by sponsoring

exchanges for Muslim students to study in Rome. He said male and female Muslim students at Pontifical universities were not about to convert to Catholicism (nor was that the goal of the program), but they often returned to their countries with a healthy view of inter-religious relations. The Ambassador noted Department-sponsored programs that brought American Muslims to overseas posts to share their experiences of living in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society, suggesting that we could work together on similar initiatives.

Comment

14. (C) While PCID's mission statement says that its mandate is for religious rather than "socio-political" issues, we have encouraged the Council to take a more proactive posture with regard to dialogue touching on terrorism. In general, we feel that PCID could provide better support to the pope as he engages on these issues. The Ambassador strongly emphasized to Fitzgerald that in this "war of ideas" an organization like his had to use all the means at its disposal in order to help the world avoid a clash of civilizations.

ROONEY